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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALEXANDRIA 00806

FOR DEPT PASS INR/OIL/B; CAIRO PLS PASS AID

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PINR EG

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ALEXANDRIA'S NEW GOVERNOR: FIRST
IMPRESSIONS

REF: CAIRO 15935

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: IT IS TOO EARLY TO ASSESS THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW MAN ON THE ALEXANDRIA HOT SEAT. INITIAL IMPRESSIONS OF GOVERNOR GAWSAQI ARE FAVORABLE, ALTHOUGH KEY CONTACTS FEEL HE HAS INSUFFICIENT GRIT AND EXPERIENCE FOR THIS VERY TOUGH JOB. OTHERS CLAIM THAT AL GAWSAQI'S ALLEGED "SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP" WITH MUBARAK WILL PAY THE GOVERNORATE MANY DIVIDENDS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) TWO WEEKS AGO, SAYYID ISMAIL AL-GAWSAQI WAS APPOINTED GOVERNOR OF ALEXANDRIA (REFTEL). THE MOVE CAME AS A COMPLETE SURPRISE (HE IS RELATIVELY UNKNOWN), AND HE WAS NEVER EVEN MENTIONED AS BEING IN CONTENTION. SINCE HIS ARRIVAL IN ALEXANDRIA, AL-GAWSAQI HAS STAYED BUSY MEETING WITH GOVERNORATE OFFICIALS AND LEADING BUSINESSMEN. REQUESTS BY FOREIGNERS FOR MEETINGS WITH HIM WERE POLITELY, BUT FIRMLY, TURNED ASIDE, UNTIL JULY 24 WHEN THE LOCAL CONSULAR CORPS WAS FORMALLY INTRODUCED TO HIM.

¶3. (LOU) THE AFFAIR, CEREMONIAL IN NATURE, HELD NO SUBSTANCE ALTHOUGH IT GAVE THE CONSULS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS THE GOVERNOR'S FLUENCY IN ARABIC, FRENCH, AND ENGLISH (HE WAS APOLOGETIC ABOUT HIS ABILITY IN THE LATTER TWO BUT GETS ALONG VERY WELL IN BOTH). HE SAID ALL THE RIGHT THINGS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP AND HIS DESIRE TO SOLVE MANY OF THE PROBLEMS AFFLICTING ALEXANDRIA. AT THE END OF THE MEETING, THOSE PRESENT SHOOK HANDS WITH THE GOVERNOR AS THEY FILED OUT OF HIS OFFICE. I MANAGED TO PLACE MYSELF AT THE END OF THE LINE (HARDER THAN IT SOUNDS AMONG MY PROTOCOL CONSCIOUS COLLEAGUES) AND, AS A RESULT, WAS ABLE TO HAVE A FEW WORDS WITH HIM. GAWSAQI SAID HE VERY MUCH WANTED TO HAVE GOOD COOPERATION WITH THE U.S. HE SAID HE HAD NOT HAD TIME TO STUDY THE DETAILS OF OUR VARIOUS AID PROJECTS, BUT HE IS AWARE THAT OUR CONTRIBUTION TO ALEXANDRIA IS CONSIDERABLE. HE WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO EMPHASIZE THAT HIS DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN TO US, AND I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS SINCERE.

¶4. (C) FIRST IMPRESSION: GAWSAQI COMES ACROSS AS A SINCERELY EARNEST, HONEST, AND WELL MEANING OFFICIAL. SEVERAL OF OUR CONTACTS, HOWEVER, HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT HE MAY NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT EXPERIENCE, GRIT, AND "STREET SMARTS" TO TACKLE ALEXANDRIA'S VARIATED SECURITY, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS. "GOOD INTENTIONS DON'T NECESSARILY MAKE A GOOD GOVERNOR," ONE KEY BUSINESSMAN REMINDED US.

¶5. (C) OTHERS POINT OUT THAT GAWSAQI MAY PROVE TO BE A MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNOR THAN MANY EXPECT. THE REASON: HIS ALLEGED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT MUBARAK. AS REPORTED REFTEL, GAWSAQI SERVED FOR A TIME IN THE EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE. SEVERAL SOURCES TELL US THAT MUBARAK AND GAWSAQI WORKED TOGETHER IN THE EAF ON TWO OCCASIONS. IN THE 1960'S, DURING THE TENURE OF SIDQI MAHMUD AS AIR FORCE COMMANDER, HE WAS ALLEGEDLY EAF LEGAL ADVISOR AND SHARED AN OFFICE WITH MUBARAK WHO WAS WORKING AS AN AIDE TO THE COMMANDER (COMMENT: THIS IS THE FIRST I HAVE HEARD THAT MUBARAK EVER HAD SUCH A JOB, AND OUR MEAGER BIO FILES FAIL TO SHED ANY FURTHER LIGHT. PERHAPS INR/B CAN. END COMMENT.)

WHETHER OR NOT THIS STORY IS APOCRYPHAL, MUBARAK KNEW GAWSAQI AGAIN AFTER HE BECAME EAF COMMANDER IN THE MID-1970'S AND WAS APPARENTLY VERY IMPRESSED WITH HIS ABILITY.

¶6. (C) ANOTHER STORY WHICH IS CIRCULATING ALSO UNDERSCORES CLOSE LINKAGES BETWEEN THE TWO MEN: A FEW YEARS AGO, THE PRESIDENT APPARENTLY WANTED TO APPOINT GAWSAQI ATTORNEY GENERAL, A KEY POST IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM HERE. THE NOMINATION WAS THWARTED BY THE JUDGES REVIEWING THE NOMINATION BECAUSE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL MUST, ACCORDING TO EGYPTIAN LAW, BE DRAWN FROM THE COURT OF CASSATION (ONE OF THE TWO HIGHEST COURTS). GAWSAQI WAS SUBSEQUENTLY APPOINTED GOVERNOR OF BENI UQAYF. DURING A VISIT TO THIS GOVERNORATE, MUBARAK WAS SUPPOSEDLY VERY IMPRESSED WITH HIS FRIEND'S ADMINISTRATION, AND ON JULY 10 HE REWARDED HIM WITH ALEXANDRIA.
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¶7. (C) ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION INR CAN SHED ON GAWSAQI WOULD BE APPRECIATED. NUMEROUS PHOTOS WERE TAKEN DURING THE JULY 24 CONSULAR CORPS PRESENTATION, AND WE WILL FORWARD ONE OF THE GOVERNOR AS SOON AS WE RECEIVE A COPY. INR MAY ALSO WISH TO NOTE THAT GAWSAQI SERVED A SHORT TIME IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND MAY HAVE HAD A BRIEF POSTING IN THE U.S.

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